

AOF News & Views

Sacramento, California

July 2010

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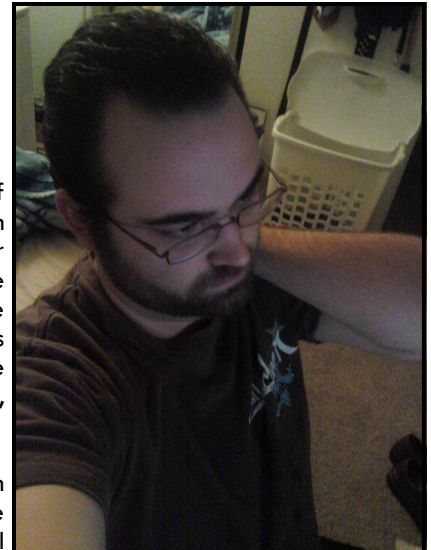
Sunday, July 11, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Scientology Revealed!

Speaker Gary Alexander began to study the Church of Scientology in January of 2008, following the church in the news and listening to hours of testimony of former members. In February of 2008 he became active in the protest community known as "Anonymous," who picket the church and spread word of its abuses. He designed flyers and signs for the following year and a half. Since then he has been devising new ways to get the message out, which brought him to creating this presentation.

His presentation will include a brief history of L. Ron Hubbard, the theories and claims of Dianetics and the formation of the Church of Scientology. After that he will delve into the practices, goals, and organization of the Church of Scientology. He will conclude with a report on abuses and scandals, and why people need to be aware of this.

Please be warned: L. Ron Hubbard said that if the mind is not prepared for the information (through rigorous Scientology training), you could catch pneumonia, and die.

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AOF August 8 General Meeting, 1:30-4:00 p.m. Coming In August: Summer Video "The Truth Seeker"

Our air-conditioned August meeting will be a screening and general review of the new one-hour documentary, *D.M. Bennett: The Truth Seeker*. Produced by Rocerick Bradford, based on original sources, it tells the tale of DeRobigne Mortimer Bennett (1818-1882) and his wife, Mary Wicks, former Shakers.

D.M. Bennett was the "blasphemous" American freethinker, publisher and free-speech martyr who founded *The Truth Seeker*, the oldest freethought magazine extant today, and who became the most successful freethought publisher in America. Readers and admirers included Mark Twain, Clarence Darrow and Robert G. Ingersoll. But he caught the ire of Anthony Comstock, the U.S. Post Office's "special agent." Censored and prohibited, persecuted in a controversial and widely publicized obscenity trial, Bennett's fight for free speech went all the way to the White House, and inspired the largest protest of its kind in the 19th century. The video also investigates Bennett's prominent role in the National Liberal League, his interactions with leading suffragists and the National Defense Association (a forerunner of the ACLU), and his flirtation with spiritualism and theosophy.

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Please see Gary's page on the Atheist Nexus website, <http://www.atheistnexus.org/profile/GaryAlexander>

We invite you to bring something edible or potable for the snack table. Please think in terms of finger foods (canapés, brownies, those little round "quiche-y" things, chips & dip, etc.), or fruit juice, or soda pop. Please *not* soup, *not* lasagna, nothing requiring utensils. And nothing heavy, because we hope to have a post-meeting dine-out as usual. And, "potable" means beverage, so don't be a wiseacre, OK?

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community.

July 24, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

AOF Highway Clean-Up By Don Knutson



Since October of 1995, AOF has maintained the two-mile stretch on Highway 99 between Elkhorn Boulevard and Elverta Road. Come help us clean litter and debris, enjoy a morning commune with nature, and who knows what you may find? (In the years we have done this, we have recovered a number of *highly unusual* items.) AOF will provide all necessary safety equipment, including comfortable hard-hats and gloves, safety vests, collection bags, and handy trash pickers. To get to the site, travel north from Sacramento on I-5, past Arco Arena. Take the "Highway 99 - Yuba City, Marysville" exit. Exit at Elkhorn Boulevard less than a mile north.

AOF Board (2010)

President: Beverly Church

Vice President: Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Jillian Stanley

Treasurer: Ken Nahigian

Directors at large: David Flanders, Paul Geisert, Brian Jones, Ken Nahigian, Mario Sandri

AOF Standing Committees

All AOF members are urged to volunteer in the organization. There are openings in every committee listed here. Please contact the chair or coordinator of any area of interest to you to learn details of getting involved. We would love to have your participation! Phone AOF 916-447-3589 or e-mail aofboard@aofonline.org for direct contact to relevant personnel.

Programs and Events Committee

Program Planning (Team Coordinator, Brian Jones)
Meeting Matters / Logistics (Team Coordinator, Open)
Social Activities (Team Coordinator, Open)

Membership Committee

Members Tracking (Team Coordinator, Ken Nahigian)
"Freethought Friends" (Team Coordinator, Jillian Stanley)
Outreach / Recruiting (Team Coordinator, Steve Campbell)

Communications Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
AOF News Team (newsletter editor, events editor, public editor, postmaster, webmaster)

Education, Activism and Service Committee

Service Projects Coordinator: Don Knutson
Education/Action Coordinator: Mynga Futrell

Building / Reason House Committee

Beverly Church, Chair
Paul Geisert, Mynga Futrell, Mario Sandri

Freethought Day 2010: Date to be announced

Beverly Church, Chair. (Save the date! – It's a celebration of reason and church/state separation)

Darwin Day 2011: Date to be announced

Mynga Futrell and Bronda Silva, Co-Chairs
(Save the date! – It's a celebration of science and humanity)

AOF Voluntariat

Affiliation Liaisons

Mynga Futrell, Atheists Alliance International (AAI), <http://atheistalliance.org/>
Kevin Schultz, American Atheists (AA), <http://atheists.org/>
Beverly Church, American Humanist Association (AHA), <http://americanhumanist.org/>
Hank Kocol, Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), <http://secularhumanism.org/>

AOF News Team

Newsletter Editor: Kevin Schultz
Postmaster: Jerry Sloan
Webpeoples: Pat Kelley, Robert Poeschel (Openings for Events Editor and Public Editor)

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Books and More

AOF June Meeting Recap

By Jillian Stanley

Our June meeting was a variation on the open-mike program we often have in the summer. Members and guests were invited to share their thoughts about some particular items of “media”—book, film, etc. This program turned out to be a great success, as almost everyone in attendance made a presentation.

Bill Potts led off with a review of a novel called [CIA, Mission to Burundi](#), by John Bernier. Bill admitted that the book, published in 1979, has a preposterous plot, not to mention numerous typos, yet he can't put it down. (Bill, this book is listed on Amazon, but there are no reviews—why don't you weigh in and be the first?)

Norma Howe is an author of novels for children and young adults, visiting AOF for the first time along with her husband Bob. She brought copies of her newest book, [Angel in Vegas](#). Yes, it is indeed the story of a guardian angel on assignment in Las Vegas, and although intended to appeal to readers as young as ten, it sounds funny and intriguing

(at least to someone who enjoys young people's fiction, as I do).

Ken Nahigian liked a comic novel about angels—a good one who deals in rare books and a fallen, demonic one. The plot of [Good Omens](#), a 1990 book by Neal Gaiman and Terry Pratchett, sounds complicated, but I have found reviews comparing it to the works of Douglas Adams and to Monty Python, which is certainly a good omen.

Don Knutson recommended [The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty](#), by well-known animal rights activist Peter Singer. The book focuses on how people can do more to help others by giving more, and giving competently.

Jerry Sloan recommended [God's Bullies: Power, Politics, and Religious Tyranny](#), a 1982 book by Perry Deane Young, which deals with the origin and growth of the religious right.

Allen Demo talked about a new science series called “Through

the Wormhole.” Narrated by actor Morgan Freeman, it's on the Science Channel, at 7 (and possibly 10) p.m. Wednesdays. (You can find more information about this series at [imdb.com](#)). He also likes a book called [The Cosmic Landscape: String Theory and the Illusion of Intelligent Design](#), by Leonard Susskind. The author attempts to get complicated ideas about physics across to lay readers.

Another newcomer to AOF, Dustin Schell, recommended [The Portable Atheist, Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever](#), an anthology edited with commentary by Christopher Hitchens. Bill Potts also likes this book, especially Hitchens' introduction.

Ed McConnell found an article in the February 2010 issue of [Free Inquiry](#) magazine dealing with the demise of Catholicism in the West, and its growth in the Third World countries. (Unfortunately, I failed to note the name of the article's author, and my computer cannot link me to the magazine's website, for some reason.)

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Atheists and Other Freethinkers



AOF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. It is one of 50 member societies of the **Atheist Alliance International** (“a positive voice for atheism”). AOF

also maintains affiliations with the Council for Secular Humanism, American Atheists, and the American Humanist Association.

AOF's Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the association, Atheists and Other Freethinkers, is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives.

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Reprinting of original material in this newsletter is granted to atheist, freethought, rationalist, skeptical, and secular humanist groups as long as acknowledgment is given. Exchange of newsletters with aforementioned organizations is solicited.

Historical Figures Series

The Anglo-Israelites

By Ken Nahigian

They call it Anglo- or British-Israelism, Christian Identity or sometimes Kingdom Identity; pick your name. At the common core is a singular and queer premise, an off-center weight that rolls like dice in a crooked crapshoot: that the Jews are not the real Jews. The *real* ones, the living God-chosen and blessed Israelites, are the White Saxon tribes of Britain. Say what?

Really. The logic is a tortured skein of folk history, hermeneutics and race ideology, the following of which is not unlike a tilt-a-whirl ride after too many corndogs and fried Twinkies. If you're up for it, take a breath, strap in, pop a Dramamine tab, and let's spin. First, some background.

The idea of a link between Britain and Israel has respectable roots. In Arthurian myth, the Holy Grail came to Britain for safekeeping, along with God's promise, which the Jews, clearly, had rejected. The 17th century hard-core English Puritans thought of themselves as God's new Chosen, the rebirth of the lost Israel. But they saw it as a spiritual link, not literal.

Richard Brothers (1757-1824), born in Newfoundland, took it more literally. In 1794 he published a popular book predicting the coming Millennium, saying he would personally lead the Ten Lost Tribes back to Jerusalem. Why? Because he was a true Jew, the direct blood-scion of King David, therefore the rightful heir to the British Throne. Unamused, King George III consigned Brothers to an asylum. But his ideas spread like spores.

In 1840 scholar John Wilson developed a theory that the European Anglo-Saxons descended from Scythian nomads, who were the remnants of the Ten Lost Tribes, scattered during the Babylonian Exile. Others latched onto this, including a certain Edward Hine. In 1874 he published *Forty-Seven Identifications of the British Nation with the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel*, wherein he creatively showed how the Bible equated the scattered tribes to Britain—as one example, Jer 31:10, "... declare it in the isles afar off...", clearly foretold how Israel would reside in far northern England (what else could it mean?). Hine founded a movement at home and tried to start one in America. For the most part he failed. He died in 1891. But he had spread more spores.

By the 1920's, Anglo-Israelism had perhaps five thousand followers. Then in 1920 came Howard B. Rand (1889-1991), from Massachusetts. He was first to mix it with anti-Semitism under a half-respectable veneer. Prior writers were cranks, but benign cranks; they

looked with affection on the Jews, seeing them as brethren under the same God. But Rand argued that the modern self-identified Jews were a soiled "remnant" of the "House of Judah" (whence comes the name), who had so diluted their blood with the Hittites, Khazars and other Palestinian tribes that they are mongrel frauds. Only the Saxon lines, with the Celtic and Scandinavian, retained a kind of blood-purity, and are therefore the true Israelites. (A firm advocate of this view was William J. Cameron, editor of Henry Ford's newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*.)

You might be surprised to learn that "Saxon" derives from "Isaac's Sons," and "British" comes from *Berith*, Hebrew for "Covenant." But to Howard Rand, it was all crystal clear.

Rand founded Destiny Publishers in 1937. It is still in business, cranking out "Identity" books and pamphlets. Some of its writers are far more extreme than Rand, arguing for example that Jesus was a white Saxon, and a broad conspiracy exists to cover up the Semitic identity theft. Among the more extreme are the "Yahwists," who argue that God is particular about being called by His proper name, *Yahweh*, and His son by *Yahoshua*. Despite their efforts, Anglo-Israelism and Yahwism never got far with the mainline churches, but footholds and influence often turn up elsewhere. Herbert W. Armstrong repackaged it for his Worldwide Church of God, and Randy Weaver, known for the Ruby Ridge shootout in August 1992, was a Yahwist and Anglo-Israelite.

Wesley Swift (1913-1970), a former Methodist minister from Southern California, was a hard-liner. Swift started his own church, later called the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, and had a daily radio ministry in the 1950s and 60s. He was active in the reorganized Ku Klux Klan. Because of Swift and his associates, the American strain of Anglo-Israelism became so mixed with anti-Semitism and right-wing ideology, these are nearly identical within public perception.

Swift worked up a "two-seed" or "seedliner" theory, in which the Eden Serpent seduced Eve, Cain was their child, and Cain sired the Jews. Thus all Jews are children of the devil, literally demonic. Adam's son Abel, of course, was the progenitor of today's white Europeans. In February 2001, Swift's church lost a major lawsuit to Victoria and Jason Keenan, who had been attacked by Aryan Nation thugs. Winning the church's assets, the Keenans sold its compound to the Carr Foundation, which plans to build a human rights center on the property. But Swift's church resurfaced in 2004, and continues its ministry under new

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Building A Better Future for Sacramento Takes All of Us!

Reason House Reminiscence

By Mynga Futrell

About a decade ago, several of us locals had the idea of purchasing a “Reason House.” It was an idea we pursued at some length. And, as part of the pursuit, Paul Geisert and I developed an 8-page brochure. (We also put up a web site containing content identical to the brochure.)

The web site is long gone, but I did save a copy of that brochure. Reading it over today, I conjure a “building of our own” in my mind. The Sacramento area freethought community should have such a property.

Page 2 of my lone printed brochure described the 2001 “Need” for such a building in this way:

Freethinkers are marginalized by mainstream culture and often disparaged for their outlook. A **Reason House** can be both a haven for adherents of a freethought philosophy and a beacon to the community, proclaiming:

- A nonreligious worldview is a *valid and constructive* human understanding of life and meaning;
- People having freethought outlooks *belong* (and are here to stay) in our society;
- Such persons are *just as deserving* of acceptance and *just as worthy* of acknowledgement (as worthwhile, contributing citizens) as are those people who adhere to a religious worldview;
- Our nation’s civic realm should be *egalitarian* regarding its religious and nonreligious citizens

Anyone who knows about the Brights (an endeavor that came a couple of years later) and my involvement in it will clearly recognize some of the above as “nothing new

for Mynga”...

...except, perhaps, that nowadays I’d probably be speaking more about a “naturalistic worldview” than a “nonreligious” outlook. I much prefer talking about worldview without tying it to religion or philosophy. And, clues to that *broader* idea are right there on the same page of the brochure, in the preceding section:

No gods, goddesses, or supernatural spirits will lurk in the building’s foundation; nor will they inhabit its cosmos. Its rooms will house an array of books and materials to nurture the mind and heart. Its facilities will play host to worthy endeavors. The walls will echo with rational discussion (and yes, philosophical argument) and conviviality. The roof will offer protection from whoever would try to still the occupants’ freethought voices.

The proposal to purchase a Reason House of Sacramento to serve the freethought community would be founded, as the brochure states, “on the principles and perspectives” of our local freethought organizations (varied as they may be)! The brochure puts the Reason House **Vision** of 2001 this way:

The doors of **Reason House** will be open to all who...

1. share these principles and perspectives, or
2. wish to join in camaraderie with such persons

Trouble is, the doors can’t be opened until they exist. So, why is it we don’t garner the resources and fortitude to accomplish what so many other groups have achieved? Reason House was long overdue in 2001. I think it is even *more overdue* now.

In Honor Of Martin Gardner

A Summer Puzzler: “Reversed Trousers”

Each end of a 10-foot length of rope is tied securely to a man’s ankles. Without cutting or untying the rope, is it possible to remove his trousers, turn them inside out on the rope and put them back on correctly? Party guests should try to answer this confusing topological question before initiating any empirical tests.

No cheating. The answer to this puzzler will be published in the August edition of the AOF News and Views.

Have puzzlers of your own? With answers? Send them both our way and if appropriate we will share with the AOF membership: newsletter@aofonline.org. Thank you.

AOF Subscription / Membership Form

Mail to: AOF, PO Box 15182, Sacramento CA 95851-0182 (Attn: Membership)

Name(s) _____ Phone: _____

Street _____ Apt. # _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP + 4 _____

E-mail address (please print!) _____

Membership Level (please circle one):

Patron (\$50) Family (\$30) Individual (\$20) Low-income (\$10)

Note: Membership does not include a newsletter subscription

Newsletter subscription:

___ Send my printed newsletter by postal mail (\$12 extra)

___ Send my newsletter by email (*Free!*) – my email address is above

Additional Donation: \$ _____

Total enclosed: \$ _____

Please check here if you do NOT want your name on lists occasionally provided to groups similar to AOF.

Please check here if you DO want to be an AOF Activist (e-mail address required).

AOF is a 501(c)(3) Educational Association – Dues & Donations are tax-deductible as

permitted by law. Non-members may receive the AOF Newsletter (same rate - \$12 printed, free via email).

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leaders.

So it goes. The spores first scattered by Richard Brothers and John Wilson, carried by strange winds, found soil wherever religious believers wanted a reason for ethnic hate or division. Many are indebted to them, often unknowingly—the Ku Klux Klan and Aryan Nations most obviously, but also colorful splinter groups such as the Phineas Priesthood, Jubilee, The Order, Confederate Hammerskins, Scriptures for America, the Kingdom Temple, Living Hope Church, and many white separatists. Groups breed like midges, fade in and out, and tend to share membership. It is a strange, tangled, almost incestuous web. Brothers and Wilson would find it quite confounding.

The story is not over yet, of course. And what will some of *our* ideas become, a century from now, or two? Let us hope for the best.

(Continued from page 3)

Dave Flanders brought a box of his amazing electronic gadgets to illustrate a short talk on “Brain Scanning in Heaven.” Is the belief in “God” just the result of the memory circuits of a person’s brain being reinforced with that notion? (Dave always presents his ideas succinctly but entertainingly.)

Jillian Stanley recommended two television series that recently started their new seasons. On the documentary “Whale Wars,” a camera crew goes on board the boat of the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society which endeavors to interfere with the killing of whales by the Japanese whale boats in the Antarctic Ocean. It’s riveting drama and it’s important. On “Drop Dead Diva,” the premise of a pretty, frivolous young woman dying but coming back to life in the body of a plus-size lawyer allows for a show that is not only comedy, romance, fantasy and courtroom drama, but also suggests a subtext about personality and character: who are we inside, and how much do we rely on how others see us? “Whale Wars” is on Animal Planet Friday nights; “Drop Dead Diva” is on Lifetime on Mondays. (If you have Comcast cable with On Demand, you can catch up with previous episodes of both these shows at your convenience.) Mynga Futrell sparked a discussion by talking about the term “atheist,” and how it came to be part of our organization’s name. She noted that when one uses the term atheist, one is “playing the religion game.” Would it not be better to deal with religious freedom and separation of government and religion by reading and studying the U.S. Constitution? Civics-savvy citizens could work with each other on issues.

(Note: your reporter apologizes for using more space to report on her own presentation than on other people’s—but after all, she was most familiar with her own topics!)

A Master Puzzler

Obituary: Martin Gardner (1914-2010)

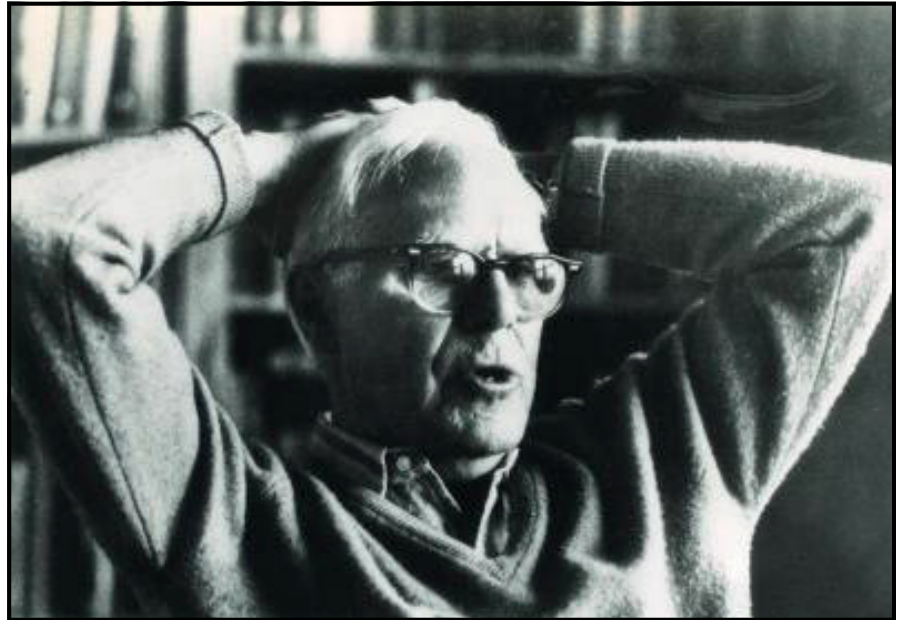
By Ken Nahigian

Martin Gardner, puzzle-master, polymath, humanist and skeptic, died in May 2010, age 95, after a brief illness at Norman Regional Hospital in Norman, OK.

For a quarter century, Gardner teased *Scientific American* readers with mathematical and logical puzzles, and indulged his own endless curiosity by producing over 70 books on topics from history to poetry to fiction to stage magic, from deep philosophy to the nuances of *Alice in Wonderland* or *Casey at the Bat*. He was so prolific and wide-ranging, some critics thought his name was a front for a panel of writers.

A founder of the modern skeptical movement, Gardner was a pioneer in refuting pseudoscience, from ESP to flying saucers, and in critiquing fringe religion. Admirers included W. H. Auden, Arthur C. Clarke, Jacob Bronowski, Stephen Jay Gould, James Randi and Carl Sagan. Vladimir Nabokov mentioned him in his novel *Invitation of a Beheading* as an invented philosopher. An asteroid is named for him (Gardner Asteroid, # 2587). Douglas Hofstadter, Distinguished Professor of Cognitive Science at Indiana University, said, "Martin Gardner is one of the great intellects produced in this country in the 20th century."

His semi-autobiographical novel, *The Flight of Peter Fromm* (1973), was about a Protestant man who struggles with his faith, examining critical scholarship and intellectual movements, and ultimately rejects Christianity while remaining a theist. Perhaps his most famous book



was *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (1957), reprinted 30 times!

He also wrote a *Oz* novel, *Visitors From Oz*, in which Dorothy encounters characters from the "Alice" books, and Geraldo Rivera.

Paul Kurtz once wanted to give him a secular humanist award, but he turned it down on the grounds that he did not consider himself a "secular" humanist.

One of Gardner's unique puzzles: What is special about the number 8,549,176,320? It is the 10 natural integers arranged in English alphabetical order (from *The Incredible Dr. Matrix*, 1976).

In a *Skeptical Inquirer* interview in 1998, Gardner said, "I just play all the time, and am fortunate enough to get paid for it."

Newsletter Submissions

Submit your newsletter items to the N&V submissions editor at this e-mail address:

newsletter@aofonline.org

or mail item to the AOF mailbox: PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182.

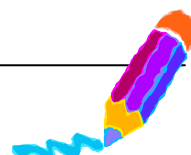
Preference is given to material in a word processing format. (To submit, attach your file to the e-mail and send.)

AOF welcomes succinct and substantive letters to the editor. Note: All letters are prioritized by AOF's publishing criteria deriving from the organization's Statement of Purpose.

Newsletter Freebie Policy

This newsletter is free by e-mail to everyone. Just send your e-mail address. If you prefer printed copy by postal mail, AOF will send one free issue on your request; after that, please subscribe at \$12 per year. For details, see the signup form on page six.

Want to send a letter to the Editor?
E-mail newsletter@aofonline.org!





P.O. Box 15182
Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

We're on the Web!
aofonline.org

July/August Calendar of Events

AOF July General Meeting: "Scientology Revealed!" Sunday, July 11, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF Highway Cleanup Sunday, July 24, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

AOF Dinner Social; location to-be-determined.
Contact: 419-2105 or shastaseer@sbcglobal.net Thursday, August 5, 6:30 p.m.

AOF August General Meeting: Video "The Truth Seeker" Sunday, August 8, 1:30-4:00 p.m.

AOF meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the second Sunday of the month, from 1:30 - 4 PM at the Sierra 2 Community Center, Room 10. Note: The months of February and October are exceptions, since AOF co-produces two public education events: (1) an outdoor fair in October - "Sacramento's Freethought Day" (Oct 2010), and (2) a science and humanity celebration - Sacramento's "Darwin Day Educational Gala" (Feb 2011). Watch the newsletter for details.

Directions to AOF's General Meetings

The Sierra 2 Center is located at 2791 24th Street in Sacramento, just south of Broadway and the Department of Motor Vehicles. Visitors are welcome. Parking is available on the street or in the rear, off 4th Avenue. AOF Board meetings are held at alternating sites, so please inquire about the location. For AOF's 24-hour recorder, call 447-3589. Leave your name and a number (repeat for clarity) and someone will phone back to answer your questions about AOF.

